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October 29, 1996

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The Honorable Reed Hundt
Chairman
Federal Communication Commission
1919 M Street, N.W., Room 814
Washington, D.C. 20554

CC: Docket No. 96 45

Dear Chairman Hundt:

On behalf of the 95,000 local school board members nationwide, I would like to urge you to seize this historic opportunity to ensure that every school child in this country has affordable access to telecommunications services. The National School Boards Association recently released a national poll of registered voters on technology that is attached. The poll shows that the vast majority of Americans believe schools should have deeply discounted rates.

Highlights of the poll include:

- Fully 64 percent of Americans believe schools should have a deeply discounted education rate for telecommunications access. Seventeen percent call for free service.
- Eighty-nine percent of Americans agree that schools in rural and high-poverty areas should receive assistance so that they have the same access to technology as schools in wealthy areas.
- Most Americans are willing to pay some amount per month—typically \$18—to ensure that school children have regular access to computers.

Clearly, this poll shows that access to technology and telecommunications services is a high priority. NSBA urges the Joint Board to act decisively to fully implement universal service for schools as is clearly the intent of Congress and the desire of the American people. To do this, NSBA believes that at least two fundamental areas must be addressed.

First, discounts for schools must be deep and sufficient so that the real affordability needs of schools are met. A sliding scale of discounts should address the relative wealth or poverty of district to ensure that no school is left unserved.

Second, it is clear that the intent of the Act with respect to schools will not be met unless discounts are provided for connections within the school and to the classroom. Without affordable access directly to classrooms, many school children will not be able to utilize the rich educational resources available through such tools as the Internet and distance learning.

Thank you for your support of America's schoolchildren. If you have any questions, please contact Michelle Richards, Federal Networks Advocate at 703-838-6208.

Sincerely,



Anne L. Bryant
Executive Director



NSBA

Excellence and Equity
in Public Education
through School Board
Leadership

Office of Advocacy

- Sammy J. Quintana
President
- Anne L. Bryant
Executive Director
- Michael A. Reanick
Senior Associate
Executive Director



Key Points Summary:
National School Boards Association
National Survey on Schools and Technology

When considering how much schools should pay for access to the Internet, two-thirds of Americans support a deeply discounted phone rate.

When asked about the rate schools should pay for phone service and on-line access, 64% say "an education rate that is deeply discounted." Another one in six voters (17%) say schools should get free phone service, while 7% opt for the residential rate; just 6% of voters interviewed chose the *status quo* of business rates.

At least 51% of the respondents in each of the 98 demographic subgroups examined favor this education rate. Specifically, middle-aged (45 to 64 year olds), more affluent, and better educated voters are most likely to support the concept of a deeply discounted education rate for school phone service. So too are "soccer moms."

A plurality of Americans favor increasing teacher training in the uses of computers in teaching as the next step for schools to take to improve their use of technology in classrooms.

From a list of five choices, 39% of American voters choose teacher training as the most important step for schools to take. The second tier of responses includes buying more computers (20%) and changing curriculums to use computers in more classes (15%). Buying better instructional software/course materials and providing access to the Internet and on-line services comprise the third tier of responses.

Belief that teacher training is the key next step in this process cuts across gender, age, partisan, ideological, and economic lines. In fact, teacher training is the top choice of 96 of 98 key demographic subgroups examined (homemakers and Southern Independents are the exceptions).

By a wide margin, increased teacher training is the top choice as a next step among people who feel schools are less prepared to teach students the technological skills they will need in the workplace of the 21st century. However, among the quarter of voters who feel schools are very prepared for this challenge, buying more computers is their choice as the next step.

Most Americans are willing to pay something to ensure children in school have regular access to computers.

Two-thirds of Americans say they would pay some amount of money every month in the form of fees or taxes to ensure that all children in public schools in their area have regular access to a computer; thirty-five percent (35%) of respondents are unwilling to pay anything.

Of those who are willing to pay something, the typical voter is willing to pay \$18 per month.

Homemakers, younger voters, Democrats, unmarried voters, and urban residents are somewhat more willing to pay something to ensure computer access for schoolchildren.

Americans believe in technology equity for rural and poor school districts.

Seven in ten voters (71%) *strongly* agree that "schools in rural and high poverty areas should receive assistance so that they have the same access and availability to technology as schools in wealthy areas." Overall, 89% of Americans agree with the statement.

Agreement is highest among "soccer moms," 18 to 34 year olds, Democrats, liberals, Southern residents, and people with children. As one might expect, while 68% of suburban residents strongly agree with the statement, 73% of urban and rural voters feel this strongly.

When asked about who should fund computer technology in schools, Americans split into roughly thirds between private business, government, and their local community.

Private company sponsorship of technology programs is more appealing to Republicans, better educated respondents, and more affluent voters. The concept shows particular strength among "soccer moms."

The government funded coalition is comprised of Democrats, less affluent, and Farm Belt voters.

Among those who support local community responsibility, people split their responses among local tax money (16%), a technology fee paid by parents with kids in school (11%), and a monthly fee on their cable or telephone bill (4%). In general, "prairie populists" (Midwest Democrats, liberals, homemakers, and younger voters) are more likely to favor using local tax money, while Republicans, conservatives, and younger men tend to favor the technology fee option.

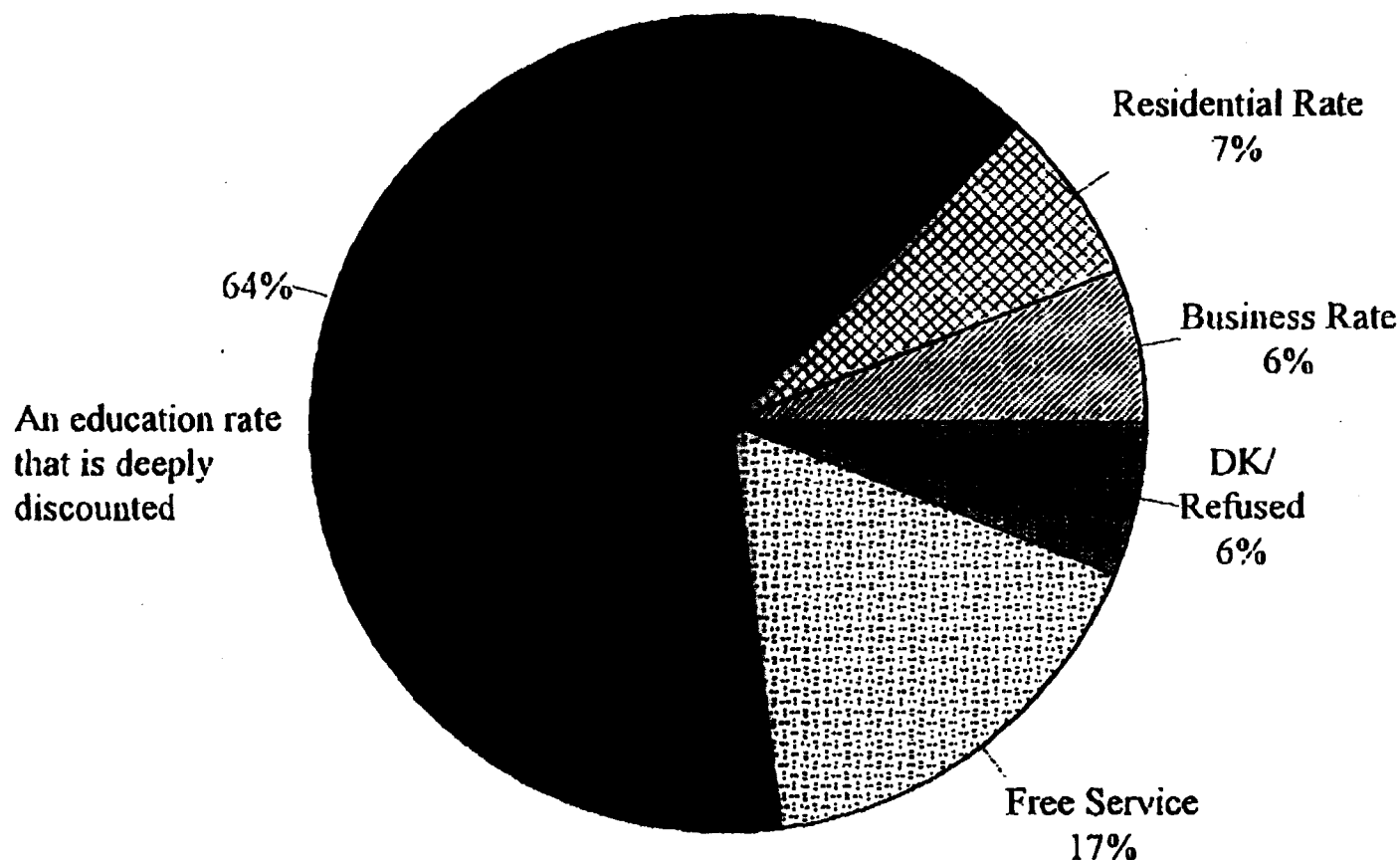
Methodology

The survey was conducted by Public Opinion Strategies on October 7-10, 1996. Eight hundred (800) registered voters in the contiguous United States were interviewed, yielding a margin of error of $\pm 3.5\%$ at the 95% confidence level. In short, if this survey were to be replicated, we would expect the results to be within 3.5% of those reported here, 95 out of 100 times.

Interviews were stratified by state and gender, and weighted by ethnicity, to reflect the known demographics of the population under study.

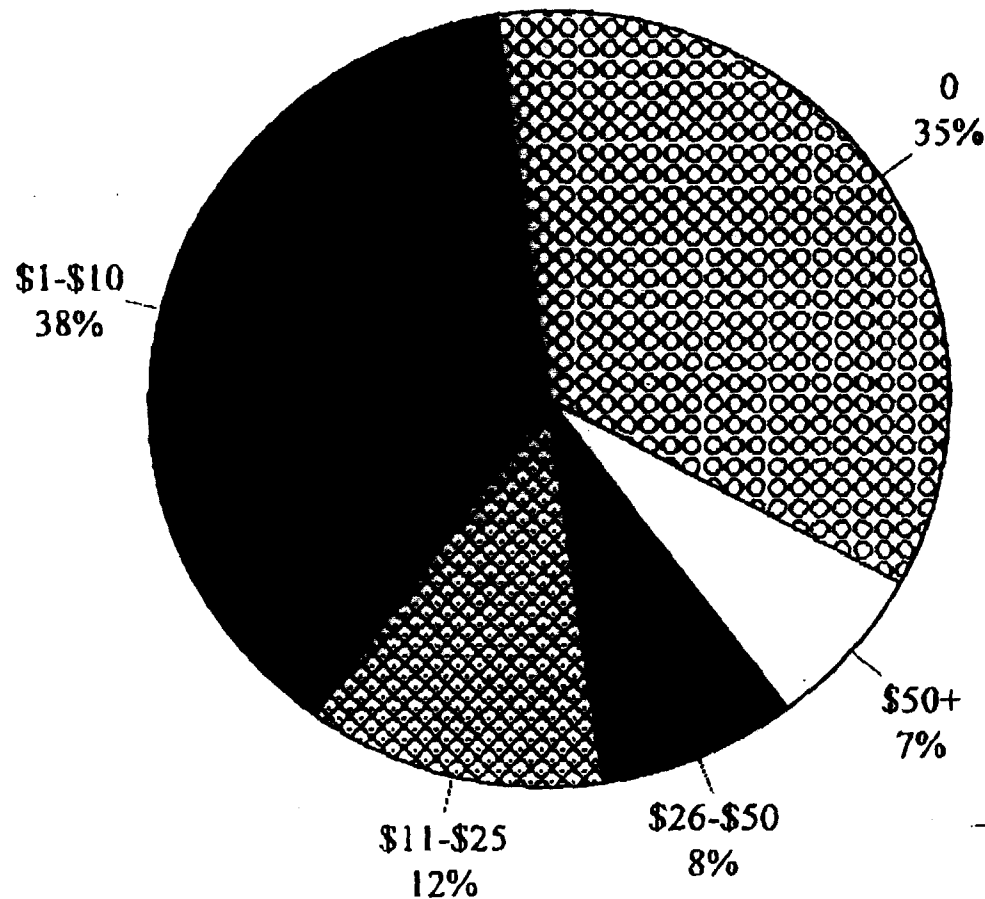
Further questions about the methodology should be directed to Bill Dalbec at 703-836-7655.

Two thirds of Americans support charging schools an education rate that is deeply discounted for phone and online access.



PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES
Nat'l School Boards Association
N=800 Registered Voters
October 7-10, 1996

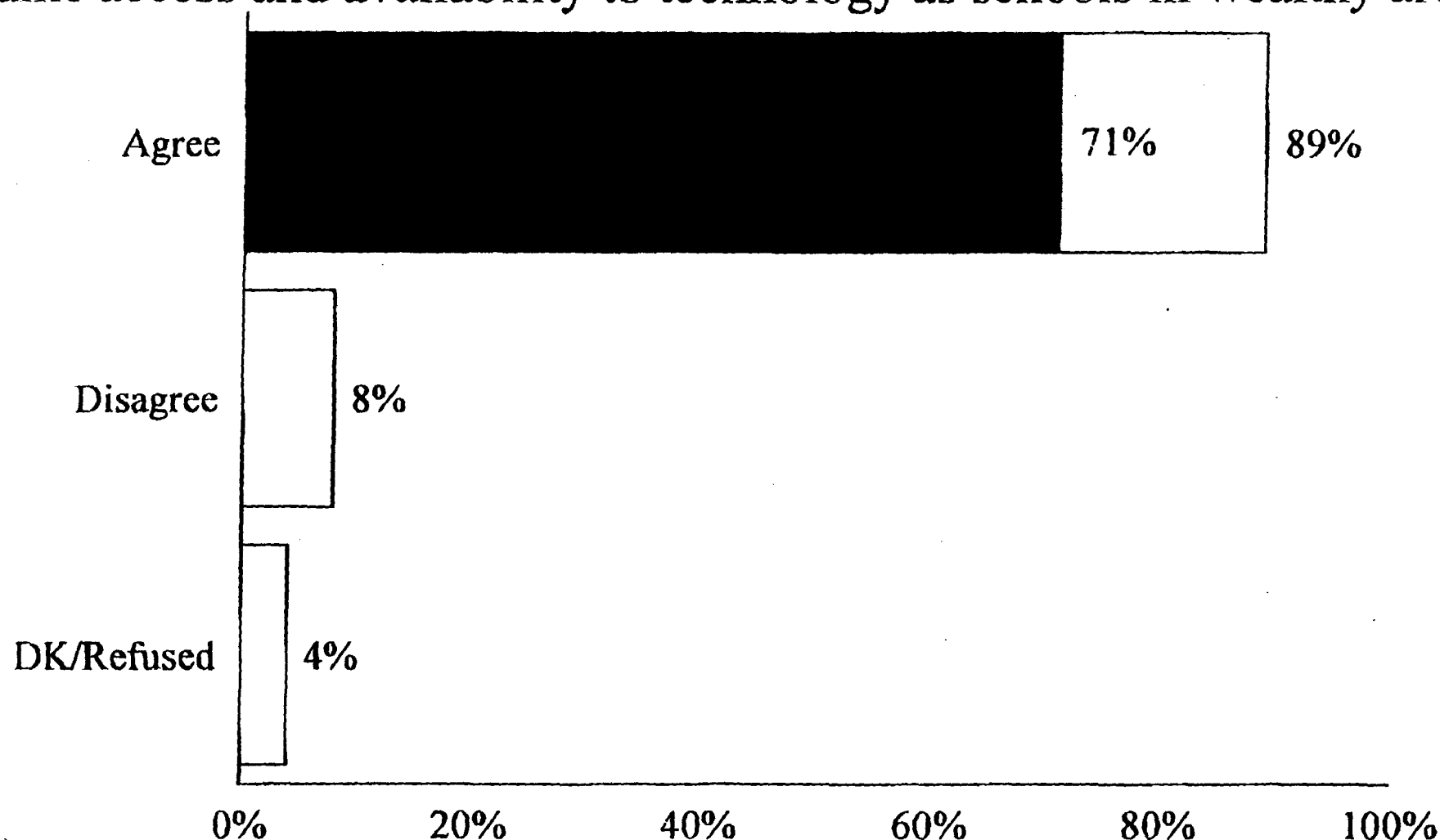
Two-thirds of Americans are willing to pay some amount of money per month to provide students with computers.



Willing to pay 65%
Pay nothing 35%

PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES
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N=800 Registered Voters
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Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Schools in rural and high poverty areas should receive assistance so that they have the same access and availability to technology as schools in wealthy areas."



■ Strongly Agree

PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES
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